National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Adaptation to climate change in the Ontario public health sector

Author(s): Paterson JA, Ford JD, Ford LB, Lesnikowski A, Berry P, Henderson J, Heymann J

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Climate change is among the major challenges for health this century, and adaptation to manage adverse health outcomes will be unavoidable. The risks in Ontario - Canada's most populous province - include increasing temperatures, more frequent and intense extreme weather events, and alterations to precipitation regimes. Socio-economic-demographic patterns could magnify the implications climate change has for Ontario, including the presence of rapidly growing vulnerable populations, exacerbation of warming trends by heat-islands in large urban areas, and connectedness to global transportation networks. This study examines climate change adaptation in the public health sector in Ontario using information from interviews with government officials. METHODS: Fifty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted, four with provincial and federal health officials and 49 with actors in public health and health relevant sectors at the municipal level. We identify adaptation efforts, barriers and opportunities for current and future intervention. RESULTS: Results indicate recognition that climate change will affect the health of Ontarians. Health officials are concerned about how a changing climate could exacerbate existing health issues or create new health burdens, specifically extreme heat (71%), severe weather (68%) and poor air-quality (57%). Adaptation is currently taking the form of mainstreaming climate change into existing public health programs. While adaptive progress has relied on local leadership, federal support, political will, and inter-agency efforts, a lack of resources constrains the sustainability of long-term adaptation programs and the acquisition of data necessary to support effective policies. CONCLUSIONS: This study provides a snapshot of climate change adaptation and needs in the public health sector in Ontario. Public health departments will need to capitalize on opportunities to integrate climate change into policies and programs, while higher levels of government must improve efforts to support local adaptation and provide the capacity through which local adaptation can succeed.

Source: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3418204

Resource Description

Communication: ☑

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience: ☑

audience to whom the resource is directed

Health Professional, Policymaker, Researcher

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Air Pollution, Ecosystem Changes, Extreme Weather Event, Food/Water Quality, Food/Water Quality, Precipitation, Temperature

Air Pollution: Particulate Matter

Extreme Weather Event: Flooding, Hurricanes/Cyclones

Temperature: Fluctuations

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Rural, Urban

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Non-U.S. North America

Health Co-Benefit/Co–Harm (Adaption/Mitigation):

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Cardiovascular Effect, Infectious Disease, Morbidity/Mortality, Respiratory Effect

Infectious Disease: Vectorborne Disease

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified